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THE TIDE TURNS IN ITALY

by a Correspondent in Rome

"As the result of the elections", some Italians are saying today, "the situation has not changed fundamentally"!

We beg to disagree, entirely. A countryside may suffer for months from a severe draught and constant menace of forest fire. Then suddenly comes the blessing of a healthy rain, followed by bright sunshine. The scenery remains the same, but the whole landscape, the fields, the trees, the men and the beasts are nevertheless refreshed, renewed and reborn. The same phenomenon can now be observed in Italy.

It was certainly very risky to hold a general election in a semi-chaotic country, like Italy, at a time like the present. But now that this risk has been taken and the dangerous operation has succeeded -- its beneficent effects are visible everywhere and in everything. As the result of the elections, the whole internal and external situation of Italy has marvelously changed. The terrible fear, which brooded over the poor country like a nightmare, has almost entirely disappeared. The horrible specter of War has noticeably receded. The entire outlook for the future in Italy, as well as the whole of Western Europe, now looks considerably brighter.

The greatest and most important part of the change is, of course, the decisive defeat of the Communist Party at the polls.

It is true that this well-disciplined party, in spite of great losses, has kept its firm nucleus of some two to three million members almost intact. It is true that its main depots of hidden weapons have not yet been discovered. It is true that the whole country still swarms with Bolshevik agents. There can be no doubt that the Communists will continue, with their usual methods of subversive intrigues, wild-cat strikes and open revolts, to undermine the foundations of the new democratic Italy. Above all, in the event of a new war, the Italian Communists would immediately swing into action as a Russian fifth column, supported from Yugoslavia.

But although all this is true, the condemnation of Communism by the great mass of the Italian people is a fact of transcendent importance. And even the possibility of a complete suppression of the Communist Party -- as an organization directed against the existence of

representative government -- is today considered in Italy by no means as difficult and dangerous to achieve as seemed the case only a few weeks ago.

II

Next to the defeat of Communism the most important change brought about by the elections is the stupendous victory and enormous growth of Premier de Gasperi's Christian Democratic Party.

This event in Italy is something quite different from the victory of the Republicans or Democrats in the United States; or in England the victory of the Labour Party or the Conservatives. Here it is the victory of freedom over tyranny, of peace over war, of good over evil. The Italian people did not merely vote Democratic. They voted also, and foremost, Christian. The wild, persistent and shameless attacks of the Communists against the Church did not harm it in the least. On the contrary, these attacks considerably increased clerical prestige and respect in the eyes of the Italian people.

In Apocalyptic times like the present, the great mass of the people receive from religion and church a stimulus similar to that felt by the early Christians. Through the whole of Italy something of a religious revival has been proceeding for months. The walls of cities and villages during recent weeks have been plastered with huge V's, for "Votare!" -- vote; the sign also of "Victory" for the Allies during the last war. But actually the sign under which the Italian people rallied was that of the simple Christian Cross, held before them by the Christian Democratic Party. Such an event, of almost biblical character, is apt to have wide consequences and influence on the whole future bearing of the Italian people and of Italian politics.

Credit must also go to the ceaseless work of Prime Minister Alcide de Gasperi. Since political unification, 78 years ago, Italy never had an executive so able, so honest and at the same time so truly Christian. The great multitude of Italians instinctively feel the high political and moral qualities of this great leader. Even those belonging to factions far to the left or right of de Gasperi's own position supported him in the electoral struggle. Less than a year ago many Italians used to criticize de Gasperi for being "too vague", "too timid", "too much inclined to compromises with the Left". Of these reproaches nothing is now heard.

III

Other important changes in Italian life brought by the elections are: (1) the success of the Independent (Saragat) Socialists, and (2) the awakening of the middle classes. The great number of votes

gathered by the Independent Socialists means that Italy will henceforth again have a strong, non-Communist and Western-minded Socialist Party. The participation of this reborn Socialist Party in any future coalition government will, in the eyes of many Italians, guarantee the execution of the social part of its program. And by so doing, it will assure in the future a more active and constructive collaboration of the working man in the building of a new and more democratic Italian State.

The awakening of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy came late, but it came. In face of the dangers which threatened Italy during the last year, even the great Italian landowning and industrial families, including the Colonna, Torlonia, Aldobrandini, Pirelli, Agnelli, Albertini, Crespi, etc., decided to make sacrifices for the common cause of freedom. So they contributed large sums to the party funds of the Christian Democrats and the other non-Communist parties. We know of a certain Roman noble who started collecting for the Christian Democratic Party among his friends and succeeded within a few hours in gathering no less than 20 million lire. A few months ago, these same people probably wouldn't have given him a single soldo. This co-operative attitude indicates that there is now a fair chance of putting the whole internal and social life of Italy on a new and more healthy basis.

The truth demands, alas, that we also take note of one negative change in the otherwise positive and bright Italian post-election picture. We mean the reappearance in the Italian Parliament of a new party with more or less pronounced Fascist leanings.

This is the so-called "Movimento Sociale Italiano", MSI, pronounced by the Italian "Miss". They took only some ten seats, but their existence alone will give the Communists opportunity to divert public attention from their own activities to those of the MSI, and to trumpet the reappearance of a "Fascist danger". Actually the Communist Party has been and remains the No. 1 danger of post-war Italy.

Unwelcome as is the appearance of the MSI, its importance must not be exaggerated. At present it is a party without leaders, without funds and without a fixed program. Its rank-and-file consists chiefly of ex-Fascists who have found no jobs and no bread in the new State, and who for this reason only have joined this extremist group. Many, of course, joined the Communist Party for the same reasons.

It certainly is bad nowadays for an Italian who was formerly a Fascist. But for this reason alone he should not be left to starve.

The democratic State, on the contrary, should try to make him a useful member of Society. If the new Italian Government, aided by the Marshall Plan, can succeed in improving general conditions, then also with time such ugly post-war misfits as this neo-Fascist "Miss" will entirely vanish from the arena of Italian life and politics.

IV

The first pre-occupation of the new Italian Government, to be formed in May, on the basis of the election results, will obviously consist of an intelligent gathering of the fruits of victory, and in a further strengthening of its internal and foreign position.

Here the American reader must bear in mind that it would be a great and fatal error to think that in a country like Italy, a definite consolidation of conditions can be achieved by means of the ballot alone. Representative government on the European Continent cannot -- in contrast to its more enviable Anglo-Saxon counterpart -- control without a strong and reliable police force and without reliable armed forces in reserve. Undoubtedly the election result was in part determined by the parading on the streets of Rome, Milan, Turin, Genoa, Naples, Bari, Palermo, etc., a few weeks before April 18, of the newly created and splendidly armed police force and Army regiments.

But 300,000 armed men for a country which, like Italy, has within its borders a fifth column of some two or three million armed Communists, and to the east an almost undefended frontier with the "Iron Curtain", is not enough. De Gasperi, Einaudi, Scelba, Saragat, Lombardo and the other responsible statesmen know that very well.

Therefore, one of their first actions after the formation of the new Government will probably be a renewal of Italy's request for a speedy revision of the peace treaty, and particularly of its unbearable disarmament clauses. The young Italian republic must, if its freedom and independence should be threatened from inside or outside, possess the means of self-defense. These must be regained if the beneficent changes brought by the elections of April 18 are to prove lasting, and a genuine blessing to Italy, Europe and world peace.

Our Italian Correspondent analyzed the pre-election situation in HUMAN EVENTS of January 7, 1948.

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By Frank C. Hanighen

April 28, 1948

As Stassen's strength mounts, there is increasing talk about a rapprochement between the forces of Taft and Dewey. Such a development would benefit from the truce -- be it tacit or specified -- between the two candidates. This column on January 30 reported that Taft and Dewey had met early in that month and agreed not to attack each other in the campaigning, at least until April. The Ides of April came and indeed produced obvious reasons why such a modus vivendi should be extended. The NMG report has been denied by leaders in both camps; but has been reaffirmed by others who are in a position to know. Now comes a report that powerful person-ages in the GOP are working to effect a Taft-Dewey deal. The nature of such a pact awaits the outcome of the Ohio and Oregon primaries.

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The White House is playing some very crude politics with the appointments to the Atomic Energy Commission. Obviously, nothing would please the President so much as another bitter dispute between GOP Senators about Lilienthal. The scrap over the Lilienthal appointment last year helped create the picture of a divided Republican majority. Truman profited in the public opinion polls; and the stock of Congress declined. Today, Mr. Truman is desperately seeking to recapture that happy situation by naming Lilienthal again, this time for a five-year term.

Judging by the sounds of anger in the Upper Chamber, he has initially drawn blood. Senator Bourke Hickenlooper, Chairman of the Senate Atomic Energy Committee, visited the White House and proposed that Lilienthal be appointed for only one year. The President was blandly vague. As the story goes, before Hickenlooper got back to the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, Truman announced the appointment of the present head of the Commission for a five-year term. Hickenlooper is furious. He wants to avoid a controversy lest it impair the work of the Commission -- and he is also a Republican.

Another Senator who would rather not see a repetition of the Lilienthal dispute is Vandenberg. Last year, the Michigan Senator hesitated for a long time before taking sides; finally came out for Lilienthal. This year, he will probably endeavor to prevent an out-in-the-open fight. He sincerely fears that harm may come to atomic development if an imbroglio occurs; and he certainly does not want party harmony damaged in the Chamber over which he presides. Finally, some political observers remark that "Van" would eventually have to take sides in such a debate, and that would scarcely be helpful to his reputed Presidential ambitions.

As to the merits of the developing quarrel, we obtained one detached view from a Democratic Senator vitally concerned: "It's the President who is playing politics", he said, "not the Republicans. The Republicans are willing to okay appointments for all the other members of the Commission, even New Deal members. But some Senators are worried about reports of fellow travellers in the Lilienthal personnel. Opposition to Lilienthal isn't anti-Semitic. Taft is known to favor Lewis Strauss, a Jew, as Lilienthal's successor. Anyway, Lilienthal doesn't want any more trouble, and is willing to take a one-year appointment. If we pass an amendment extending all the appointments for one year only, then maybe we can avoid a controversy which would hamper the work on atomic energy. But I'm afraid Harry wants to play it the political way."

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While exultation over the Italian election results is justified, there should be some sobering after-thoughts. For instance, the victorious Christian Democrats won most of their votes at the expense of Right Wing rather than Left Wing parties.

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The New York Times correspondent in Rome (April 25) reported: "It is not difficult to prove . . . that it (the Left Wing vote) has decreased only very slightly." That correspondent also suggests that the Communists (as distinct from their allies, the Left Wing Socialists) have actually increased their voting strength. The Communists obviously remain a potent factor in the Italian situation, despite their electoral defeat.

Also, Marxism emerged from the election just as strong as ever. The Right Wing Socialists (split from the Left Wing) are anti-Communist, but they are thoroughly Marxist. If their votes be added to the Communist and Left Wing Socialists, the Marxist total shows no important losses since the last election. Moreover, it is pointed out that the ruling Christian Democratic Party has some collectivist leanings. All in all, socialist influence on the Government and on the economy is not likely to decrease. Since this influence in Western Europe has strongly contributed to the formation and maintenance of policies which have held back that area economically, the Italian election result brings little confidence in an early recovery.

Additionally, one weapon of Western political warfare used to defeat the Communists may prove a boomerang. The Western Powers demanded that all of the Trieste area be returned to Italy. Italians were grateful, but many have doubtless considered this as an unqualified promise. Now, the Trieste problem is very complicated, and there may be no way short of war to integrate the entire Trieste territory into Italy. It is doubtful that the West has any intention of pressing the issue that far. It is a good guess that many Italians are going to be disillusioned with Western "promises".

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According to one prevalent view, the Bogota affair should be regarded mainly as the outgrowth of bad economic and social conditions, rather than an example of Communist tactics. Examination of cases, however, shows the dubiousness of such an interpretation. A comparison between the revolutions in Colombia and Costa Rica is especially revealing.

The Washington Post in an editorial on April 22 remarked: "The fracas in Costa Rica seems to belie the contention that a high standard of living alone is sufficient to guard against Communist infiltration. For Costa Rica has generally been regarded as a model democracy, with an economic status considerably better than its neighbors." From most reports, one might well conclude that the Post makes a good point. According to the dispatches, the small Communist element in Costa Rica adroitly exploited its position as a "third force" between Conservatives and Liberals, and thereby succeeded in throwing a peaceful and prosperous country into a bloody civil war. If it had not been for Communist intrigue, political differences and what few economic ills afflicted the country might have been settled in the orderly, constitutional manner which had marked Costa Rican politics for many years.

Similarly, in Colombia (also with a long constitutional record), the intervention of the Communist trouble-makers seems to have been the decisive factor. A Conservative executive held power because the Liberal opposition was split into Right and Left Wing factions. The Conservative President sought to ease the situation by including members of the Liberal Party in his cabinet. He failed, because of Communist infiltration of Left Wing Liberal ranks. The Communist trigger men did the rest. In short, both in Colombia, which suffered from some economic dislocation, and in comparatively prosperous Costa Rica, the problem was primarily political, not economic or social.

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This column, on January 28, reported claims that the "Miracle of Dunkirk" in 1940 was not as miraculous as Winston Churchill described it; that five days before the British evacuation, Hitler ordered his troops to cease attacks on the British forces; and that Hitler did this for political reasons. But not everybody has agreed with these assertions. By the courtesy of Colonel Truman Smith, formerly of the U. S. General Staff, we can throw further light on what may be one of the great historical controversies. Colonel Smith wrote to Germany and obtained the views of four important German officers on this subject, one of them a former Chief of Staff of the German Army.

All four agreed that an extraordinary pause took place before Dunkirk which was bitterly protested by the Tank Division commanders. The latter evidently believed they could smash or capture the remainder of the British Army. All four also agreed that it was Hitler who personally gave the order for the pause. They differ, however, as to whether military or political considerations prompted Hitler's order. General von Halder, Chief of Staff of the German Army at the time, tried to dodge the question: "There were no military reasons. About other reasons, including those of a political nature, much was heard later. Since I am not able to check up on these rumors, I would rather not say anything about it."

Major General Adolf Heusinger, former Chief of Operations, writes, "In my opinion political reasons were not involved, only such of a purely military nature". Heusinger says that Hitler recalled the Flanders of 1917 and feared that his tanks would be used up in the bad terrain around Dunkirk and would not be ready for the next phase of the war, in France. On the other hand, General von Blumentritt (von Rundstedt's Chief of Staff at the time) takes the opposite stand: "We, that is, von Rundstedt, von Sodenstern, von Tresckow and I, believed and still believe today that political reasons also were involved."

Von Blumentritt writes at some length in support of the "political" view. He says, "Previously at Charleville, Hitler said to the four of us: 'In six weeks we shall have peace. I will enter into a gentleman's agreement with England and grant extensive demands. The question of colonies is not a vital one for me, only a matter of prestige. The British Empire is just as necessary on this earth as the Catholic Church. I will even offer to help England in case of a conflict with the Soviets.' He talked for 30 minutes about peace with England. After the conference, Rundstedt said, 'Well, if that is all he wants we shall have peace.' Shortly thereafter came Dunkirk."

Von Blumentritt then goes on to mention Hitler's coolness towards "Sea Lion", the projected but abandoned invasion of England, and the Blitz. "Goering insisted on them [air attacks on England], while Hitler held back and did not want to go ahead." Von Blumentritt concludes, "We believed in politics, that is, preservation of British forces in order to build golden bridges for them across the channel and toward peace". The fourth officer queried was Colonel Kurt Hesse, Press Relations Chief of the German Army in 1940. In his letter, he clearly agrees with General von Blumentritt.

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We always felt uncomfortable when journalistic friends, some years ago, would write with derision about the fact that Archibald MacLeish, then a Government Commissar, is a "poet". Poets, after all, can have flashes of prophetic insight. For instance, Paul Valery, French poet and critic, in 1926 wrote an essay, "Notes on the Grandeur and Decadence of Europe", in which he remarked: "Europe obviously aspires to be governed by an American committee. Her entire policy is aimed toward that end." (From Reflections on the World Today, a collection of Valery's essays, just published in translation by Pantheon Press, New York.)

Book Events

Lenin: A Biography, by David Shub. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, \$5.00. Reviewed by J. M. Lalley.

Mr. Shub's work has two unique merits. The first is detachment from both the fears and the fanaticisms that Lenin, in his brief career as dictator of Russia, unleashed upon the world. The second is Mr. Shub's special knowledge of the events with which he deals. He is himself an old revolutionary, evidently of the Menshevik persuasion, who served his time in Siberia, and who had personal acquaintance not only of Lenin but of many other prominent Bolsheviks. What he gives us here is the portrait of a double personality. In his private life Lenin was gentle, affectionate, humorous, and simple almost to the point of humility. As a revolutionist he was ruthless almost to the point of madness. Once in power he permitted no scruple of conscience, no consideration of pity, no slightest doubt of the rectitude of his logic, to interfere with his determination to alter the whole course of human history and to refashion the whole of Society according to his will. He destroyed moralities to found a religion; sanctioned the most terrible crimes and cruelty to assure what he devoutly believed would be for the ultimate happiness of men.

The life of Lenin poses, I think, more sharply than any other, the ancient and unresolved question of chance and fatality in history. The main lines of his philosophy and the sense of his prophetic mission were, as Mr. Shub tells us, well established even before the abortive revolution of 1905, but nothing seemed more remote, even to the bare handful of Lenin's disciples, than that he would one day impose them on a great part of the human race. Although Lenin seems never to have doubted that his interpretation of history was infallible, the movement of events often took him by surprise. When news of the March revolution of 1917 reached him in exile, he refused to believe it until it was confirmed by the Zurich newspapers. Then, of course, all his will and energy were directed to the purpose of getting into Russia. But there were no means of getting to Russia without the knowledge and assistance of either the Central Powers or the Western Allies. What ultimate path the Russian revolution may have taken, if the German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg and Marshal von Ludendorff had not let themselves be persuaded that it would be a smart stroke of policy to send Lenin into Russia in a sealed railroad car, is merely another variant of the problem of Cleopatra's nose. Mr. Shub tells us that Lenin himself had little faith in the ability of the Bolsheviks already in Russia, among them Comrade Stalin, "to steer the right course for the party". But whether predestined or fortuitous, the arrival of Lenin at the Finland Station in St. Petersburg on April 16, 1917 was one of the grand and decisive moments of history, not less tremendous than the apparition to Constantine at the Milvian bridge.

One of the many valuable revelations in Mr. Shub's biography is that of Lenin's ideological indebtedness to two older revolutionaries, Peter Tkachev, who proposed a forcible seizure of power and a dictatorship by a revolutionary minority, and Sergei Nechaiev, who preached the necessity of furthering the revolution by fraud, treachery and terror. Mr. Shub makes it clear that it was the demoniac genius of such teachers, shocking to revolutionists of the humanitarian school, that gave the Bolshevik revolution its oriental and absolutist complexion. To Lenin everything characteristically European was also "bourgeois", and therefore deserving of destruction. In a sense this was true even of Marxist materialism, which in Lenin's interpretation was transformed into a mystique capable of inspiring fanatical devotion and sacrifice. It became an Apocalyptic vision and acquired an oecumenical mission to be advanced through a world wide conspiracy, without mercy to unbelievers and heretics. In short, to understand the mind of Lenin, as Mr. Shub has revealed it, is to understand the religion of Communism.